

Goguryeo language

The **Goguryeo language**, or **Koguryoan**, was the language of the ancient kingdom of Goguryeo (37 BCE – 668 CE), one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea. Early Chinese histories state that it was similar to the languages of Buyeo, Okjeo and Ye, all of which are unattested. Lee Ki-Moon grouped these as the Puyŏ languages.

The evidence for the language is limited and controversial. The most cited evidence, a body of placename glosses in the *Samguk sagi*, has been interpreted by different authors as Koreanic, Japonic, or intermediate between the two. Other authors suggest that they reflect the languages of other peoples in the part of central Korea captured by Goguryeo in the 5th century.

Other evidence is extremely sparse, and is limited to peculiarities in the Chinese language of Goguryeo inscriptions and a very few Goguryeo words glossed in Chinese texts. Many Korean authors suggest that the language was a dialect of Old Korean. Other authors suggest that it was the original form of Koreanic, which then replaced Japonic languages in the south of the peninsula. Others maintain that it was Tungusic, or that there is insufficient evidence to establish its affiliation.

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Goguryeo	
	Koguryo
Native to	Goguryeo
Region	Manchuria, Korea
Extinct	7th–10th century?
Language family	Koreanic <div>▪ Goguryeo</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	zkg
Linguist List	zkg (http://multitree.org/codes/zkg)
Glottolog	kogu1234 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/kogu1234)



Descriptions in Chinese sources

Chinese histories provide the only contemporaneous descriptions of peoples of the Korean peninsula and eastern Manchuria in the early centuries of the common era.^[1] They contain impressionistic remarks about the languages of the area based on second-hand reports, and sometimes contradict one another.^[2] Later Korean histories, such as the *Samguk sagi*, do not describe the languages of the three kingdoms.^[2]

The state of Buyeo, in the upper Songhua basin, was known to the Chinese from the 3rd century BCE.^[3] Chapter 30 "Description of the Eastern Barbarians" of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* records a survey carried out by the Chinese state of Wei after their defeat of Goguryeo in 244. The report states that the

languages of Buyeo, Goguryeo and Ye were similar, and that the language of Okjeo was only slightly different from them.^{[4][5]} Goguryeo, originally inhabiting the valley of the Hun River, believed themselves to be a southern offshoot of Buyeo. Over the next few centuries they would expand to rule much of eastern Manchuria and northern Korea.^[3]

To the south of the Chinese Lelang Commandery lay the Samhan ('three Han'), Mahan, Byeonhan and Jinhan, who were described in quite different terms from Buyeo and Goguryeo.^[6] They were said to be quite different from the Samhan ('three Han') in the southern part of the Korean peninsula.^[6] Based on this text, Lee Ki-Moon divided the languages spoken on the Korean peninsula at that time into Puyŏ and Han groups.^[7]

The same text records that the language of the Yilou to the north differed from that of Buyeo and Goguryeo. Chapter 94 of the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (compiled in 659) states that the language of the Mohe in the same area was different from that of Goguryeo. These languages are completely unattested, but are believed, on the basis of their location and the description of the people, to have been Tungusic.^[6]

The *Book of Liang* (635) states that the language of Baekje was the same as that of Goguryeo.^[8] According to Korean traditional history, the kingdom of Baekje was founded by immigrants from Goguryeo who took over Mahan.^[9]

Placename glosses in the *Samguk sagi*

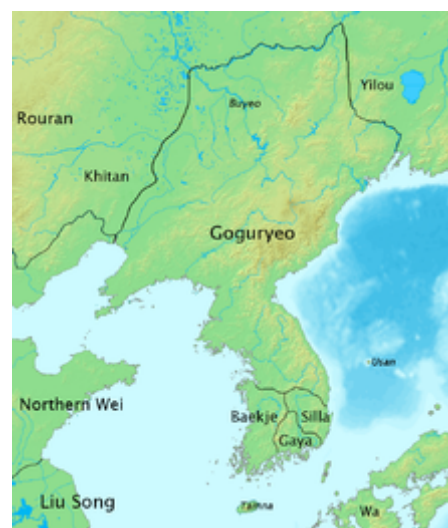
The most widely cited evidence for Goguryeo is chapter 37 of the *Samguk sagi*, a history of the Three Kingdoms period written in Classical Chinese and compiled in 1145 from earlier records that are no longer extant.^[10] This chapter surveys the part of Goguryeo annexed by Silla, with entries like

七重縣一云難隱別

The phrase 一云 'one calls' separates two alternative names for a place. The first part, 七重縣, can be read in Chinese as 'seven-fold county', while 難隱別 is meaningless, and hence seems to use Chinese characters to represent the sound of the name. From other examples, scholars infer that 難隱 means 'seven' and 別 means '-fold, layer', while the 'county' part of the gloss is not represented.^[11] In this way, a vocabulary of 80 to 100 words has been extracted from these place names.^[12] Although the pronunciations recorded using Chinese characters are difficult to interpret, some of these words appear to resemble Tungusic, Korean or Japonic words.^[13] It is generally agreed that these glosses demonstrate that Japonic languages were once spoken in part of the Korean peninsula, but there is no consensus on the identity of the speakers.^[14]



The Korean peninsula in the 1st century



The Korean peninsula in the late 5th century

Scholars who take these words as representing the language of Goguryeo have come to a range of conclusions about the language.^[14] Most Korean scholars view it as a form of Old Korean and focus on Korean interpretations of the data.^{[15][16][17]} Beckwith proposed Japonic etymologies for most of the words, and argued that Koguryoan was Japonic.^[18] Beckwith's linguistic analysis has been criticized for the *ad hoc* nature of his Chinese reconstructions, for his handling of Japonic material and for hasty rejection of possible cognates in other languages.^{[19][20]} Lee and Ramsey argue that it was somehow intermediate between Koreanic and Japonic.^[21]

Other authors point out that most of the place names come from central Korea, an area captured by Goguryeo from Baekje and other states in the 5th century, and none from the historical homeland of Goguryeo north of the Taedong River.^[22] By the 5th century, Goguryeo ruled a huge area encompassing many ethnic groups and languages.^{[23][24]} These authors suggest that the place names reflect the languages of those states rather than that of Goguryeo.^{[25][26]} This would explain why they seem to reflect multiple language groups.^[27]

Other data

Other data on the language of Goguryeo is extremely sparse,^[28] and its affiliation remains unclear.^[29]

A small number of inscriptions have been found in Goguryeo territory, including the Gwanggaeto Stele (erected in Ji'an in 414), four inscriptions on the walls of Pyongyang Castle, and a stele in Jungwon, Chungju (590s).^[30] All are written in Chinese, but some of them contain irregularities, including a few examples of object–verb order (as found in Korean and other northeast Asian languages) instead of the usual Chinese verb–object order, and some uses of the characters 之 and 伊, which some authors have connected to their use to represent Korean particles in later Idu texts from Unified Silla.^{[31][32]}

Beckwith identified a dozen names of places and people in Chinese histories that he argued were Goguryeo words.^[33] In his review of Beckwith's book, Byington criticized the historical basis of these identifications, as well as Beckwith's theories of Goguryeo origins in western Liaoning.^[34]



Goguryeo monument in Jungwon, Chungju

Chinese histories contain a few glosses of Goguryeo words:

- Chapter 30 of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (3rd century) states that 溝瀆 (Old Chinese *koro, Middle Chinese *kuw-luw*) is the Goguryeo word for 'castle'.^[35] Beckwith compared this word with Old Japanese *kura* 'storehouse'.^[36] Alexander Vovin compared this word with Middle Mongolian *qoto-n* and Manchu *hoton* 'fortified town', but with lenition of *t* as in Korean.^[37]
- Chapter 100 of the *Book of Wei* (6th century) gives 謁奢 *?jot-syæ* and 太奢 *thaj^H-syæ* for big and little older brother respectively. Vovin compared *?jot* with Late Middle Korean *nyěys* 'old' and *thaj^H* with *?æ^H-thwoj^H* (亞退) 'small, young' from the *Jilin leishi* (1103–1104). The word *syæ* is closely matched by Old Japanese *se* 'elder brother', but this has a limited distribution in Japonic, and may be a loanword.^[38]
- Chapter 41 of the *Book of Zhou* (7th century) gives 骨蘇 *kwot-su* 'ceremonial headgear', which Vovin compared with the first part of Middle Korean *kwoskál* 'ceremonial headgear'.^[39]

Vovin also pointed to Koreanic loanwords in Jurchen and Manchu, and argued that the Goguryeo language was the ancestor of Koreanic, and spread southwards to replace the Japonic languages of the Samhan.^[40] James Unger has proposed a similar model on historical grounds.^[41] Other authors suggest that Koguryoan was a Tungusic language.^{[42][43]}

See also

- Baekje language
- Balhae
- History of the Korean language
- List of Korea-related topics

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